

Wyoming Worksite Wellness' ABC's for building a wellness program

Achieving administrative wellness support

Building a dedicated wellness team

Collecting appropriate wellness data

Developing a worksite wellness program plan

Executing wellness interventions

Forming a supportive wellness culture

Generating the correct wellness outcomes evaluations

Forming a supportive wellness culture

Forming a supportive wellness culture is not an easy task. It takes the support of all members of your company's workforce at all levels. The current culture at your workplace did not develop overnight and neither will a new culture. However, with lots of dedication and working towards a healthier workforce this may become a pleasant and rewarding experience. A supportive wellness culture will:

It takes a tremendous amount of trust between the senior level of management and the workforce to change, and build a new culture in the workplace.

Extreme care must be taken to ensure that this trust is not misplaced, or misinterpreted

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- Work to build policies that make it easier for employees to gain healthy behaviors and make them a part of their daily lives
- Encourage participation in a wellness program as a “no strings attached” benefit, not a punitive requirement
- Enhance the level of communication between senior management and the workforce
- Enable the individual participant to become accountable for his/her own health improvement and maintenance
- Emphasize relationships between participants as a key to success
- Work to create a friendly facility with proactive policies. Managers must model and support healthy behavior.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this section you should be able to apply the necessary skills and knowledge gained in this section; along with the knowledge and skills gained in other sections of this toolkit to:

- Begin building a wellness culture that is supportive of promoting healthy lifestyles at work and at home
- Bring members of senior management and the workforce together to build policies that support healthy behaviors and promoting a wellness program
- Foster a belief that the workforce owns the wellness program
- Sustain an ongoing promotion of the importance of a wellness program
- Sustain a high level of enthusiasm to encourage a high level of participation in a wellness program

Wellness Culture

Just as plants won't thrive in a poor growing culture, a wellness program won't thrive in an unhealthy organizational culture. Step back for a moment and look at the big picture in your organization. How do you feel when you walk into your workplace? Is it bright, cheerful, and inviting? Or is it dingy, cluttered, and depressing? How do employees feel about coming to work? Are they cheerful and do they take time to speak to each other about their weekends and their families, or do they go to their work stations and stay there? Are the policies old, rigid, and don't make sense – “that's how we've always done it.” Or are they flexible, helpful, and logical?

Organizational culture, which includes environment, policies, and people's behavior, has a profound influence on the level of participation in health promotion programs, and indeed on the health of employees. Culture is also what establishes an “employer of choice.” Creating a true culture of health will lift your organization to new levels of competitive advantage.

Following are some ways of doing this:

- Top management should proclaim prominently that health is an important value and responsibility for the organization and its employees, and that it will be supported by the organization and its managers in every reasonable way. Perhaps add this sentiment to your vision or mission statement.
- Hold managers at all levels accountable for facilitating a healthy work setting, and reward them for success.
- Target worthless policies, rules, and practices. Put your policies and procedures through the “mission filter”; i.e., ask “does this policy help us in carrying out our workplace mission?” If not, scrap it. For example, one company had a policy of not reimbursing employees for training until they submitted a certificate of completion. This had the effect of discouraging employees from going to training because they had to spend their money sometimes months in advance of the training and then wait weeks (or months) afterward for the certificate to arrive. The solution was to reimburse upon submission of a receipt and require confirmation of completion later.
- Implement *and enforce* policies that support healthy practices, such as seatbelt use, no tobacco use, appropriate alcohol and drug use, no sexual harassment, no tolerance for violence or threats of violence, and respect for diversity.

Wellness Culture Continued:

- Where feasible, implement policies that reduce stress and increase job satisfaction. Consider, for example, flex-time, cross-training, telecommuting, teleconferencing (to reduce travel and expense), and a bring-your-child-to-work day.
- Create opportunities for employees to get involved in new projects that challenge them, tap their creativity, and broaden their skills.
- Routinely involve employees as much as possible in decision making, problem solving, and developing new systems and procedures.
- Create flexible work schedules to allow employees to attend children's school events and to exercise during the day.
- Offer opportunities to exercise, such as a walking and jogging path, fitness room with lockers and showers, discounted or subsidized fitness club memberships, and lunchtime walking or running groups.
- Include plenty of healthy food choices in your cafeteria and vending machines. Provide a comfortable place to eat and a food preparation area including a refrigerator, microwave, toaster oven, and sink in order to facilitate healthy eating.
- Schedule shift workers in such a way as to allow adequate rest.
- Offer adequate paid vacation and make sure people can (and do) take it without feeling guilty.
- Discourage excessive overtime and problem-solve reasons when it occurs.
- Provide a full service Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and actively promote its use.
- Tailor medical plan coverage to encourage appropriate treatment and preventive care, including a benefit design that incents proper management of chronic health conditions. Consider disease management programs for the latter, and a disability management program.
- Have an enthusiastic person, perhaps a member of the wellness team, and thoroughly orient new employees to all aspects of the wellness program.
- Offer on-site wellness seminars such as "lunch-and-learns." Perhaps the organization can provide lunch as an incentive to attend.

Wellness Culture Continued:

- Eliminate safety hazards and provide training on safety equipment and procedures.
- Provide ergonomically appropriate workstation furniture and equipment.
- Assure healthy environmental conditions, including adequate light, adjustable heating and cooling, a dust and allergen free work environment when possible, and noise levels that are safe and conducive to concentration.
- Ban tobacco use anywhere on the premises.
- Provide proper cleaning products, and dishcloths to disinfect bathrooms and break rooms to help reduce exposure to health threatening bacteria.

The preceding are just examples to get you started. They may not all be applicable to your work setting, and you may have additional ideas. The point is that you should not overlook the overall culture in which your wellness program must sink or swim.

